



UP Ag Connections

725 Greenland Road, Ontonagon, MI 49953

Vol. 18 Issue 10 MSU Extension October 2014

Published Monthly

NEWS & VIEWS

By Frank Wardynski, MSU Extension Educator

Welcome Katelyn Thompson to the U.P. Ag team. Katelyn started in September as Farm Business Management Educator with Michigan State University Extension and is housed in the Menominee County Extension Office in Stephenson. Katelyn comes to us with a knowledge and experience in the livestock industry and business management. I really try not to phrase it this way but Katelyn will be replacing Warren Schauer. I try not to phrase it that way because one, Warren is irreplaceable. He was uniquely qualified in his own way with a vast array of skills and experience. And two, Katelyn won't be replacing anybody; she'll be making her own mark with her own set of skills and assets.

It's taken a while to fill this vacancy. We've looked hard to find someone with Katelyn's skill set and I'm confident she is worth the wait. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science from Michigan State University, Master of Science Degree in Feedlot Management and Nutrition from Colorado State University and Master of Business Administration degree from Northwood University. Most recently we hired Katelyn away from the Auto-Owners Insurance where she worked as a farm insurance underwriter. Katelyn also has working experience associated with livestock environmental quality impact. Glad you're here Katelyn!

I wrote last month about some of the big profits being seen in agriculture today. The dairy and beef profits are at or near record levels. I've seen many articles in the popular press offering advice of what to do with the extra income. Most of the advice is solid and really needs to be considered. They address issues of expansion, getting bigger or better, tax planning, and the list goes on. Included in this issue is a really good article by Dennis Stein about planning now for farm income taxes. If you receive this newsletter in hard copy form I strongly suggest finding a computer and looking at many of the website references. He has a worksheet to estimate federal tax obligation that will be useful in planning expenses through the remainder of the year.

Jim Isleib has an article highlighting reasons to farm in the U.P. Agriculture has grown here in the U.P. over recent years as well as in areas to our south. Competition for land, particularly, has increased. It should, we operate in a free enterprise system. I appreciate Jim's article as it discusses the challenges of farming here in the U.P. as well as the opportunities. Its lots more fun operating in a growing and prospering environment.

Farmers are facing critical management decisions. How to manage profit; How to manage competition; How to use the new farm bill; Make special note of David Schweikhardt's article regarding the new farm bill and what farmers should be doing ASAP. Also, note the FSA News directly regarding their programs. We recently conducted educational sessions across the state regarding the 2014 Farm Bill Margin Protection Program for Dairy. Some may not be worried about price protection for milk with prices so favorable, but dairy expansion is growing rapidly and milk prices won't be high forever and feed prices won't be this low for long.

Finally I would like to point out the importance of working together in the U.P. In many areas our agriculture infrastructure is deficient. Farmers working together can overcome some of the deficiencies. In the last edition I have an article offer for fertility testing of bulls, bucks, and rams this fall to coordinate travel for a vet and keep costs at an affordable price. We are currently looking at a date of October 26 in the western U.P. Give me a call if you're interested. ~Frank

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MARKET REPORT (9/19/14)
 By Frank Wardynski, MSU Extension Educator

Market Ready Prices

Choice Steers	\$140-\$160	per 100 lbs.
Holstein Steers	\$135-\$158	per 100 lbs.
Hogs	\$95-\$106	per 100 lbs.
Lambs	\$150-\$180	per 100 lbs.
Cull cows	\$85-\$115	per 100 lbs.
Calves	\$175-\$280	per 100 lbs.
Goats	\$100-\$225	per 100 lbs.

Breeding and Feeder Animals

Grade Holstein cows	\$2300 - 3000	per head
Grade Holstein bred heifers	\$2300 - 3100	per head

Feed Prices across the U.P.

	Avg. \$/cwt	Avg. \$/ton	Price Range
Corn	\$13.38	\$267.50	\$220-315
Soymeal	\$35.10	\$702.00	\$640-764
Oats	\$17.30	\$346.00	\$260-432
Barley	\$13.35	\$267.00	\$185-349

Average price/100 wt. for 1 ton lots

Wanted & For Sale Listings

Personal ads will be removed monthly. We reserve the right to edit your ad. Free ads must be no more than 110 spaces. Please respect the space requirements. You can always purchase an ad if more space is required. Please call or email your ad no later than the 15th of each month. Call the Ontonagon County MSU Extension office at 906-884-4386 or email msue66@msu.edu.

Hay For Sale: 4X6 net wrapped bales. Some alfalfa-grass mix and some just grass. Call 906-497-5182

For Sale: Satoh 25 HP Tractor S-650G w/1127 hours. Also included in the sale is: front bucket, front plow, disc, brush hog. \$4500, phone 906-542-3577

Hay For Sale—4 X 5 Bales approximately 750 lbs. Great quality hay Trefoil Grass Mix, call 906-883-3525

For Sale—2 female goats; 2 years old purchased with intent to milk, but have been family pets; must sell as a pair. \$100 or best offer. Call Rebecca at 906-259-0228 or email rebeccawerner@yahoo.com

Nine Angus cows for sale. Bred to Angus bull. The cows are sound with good udders. Cows under 4 years of age \$2500.00 each. Older cows sell at livestock sale commercial price; \$100.00 additional for carrying a calf. Collins Farm, Pickford, 906-647-2011, esc413@centurytel.net

Wanted—Small square baler in VERY good condition—kicker not necessary prefer John Deere or New Holland. Please call 906-942-7182

Clare County Livestock Auction, LLC
2014 Fall Feeder Cattle Sales
Clare, MI

David Clark, Owner/Auctioneer
Contact # 810-441-6191
Sale Barn # 989-386-9256

All Sales on Thursday and start at 1:00 pm
 All Cattle weighed at sale time
 Accepting cattle on Wednesday ALL DAY!!
 All overnight cattle will be fed & watered!!

Colored and Holstein
 Steers, Heifers & Calves
 Some cattle pre-conditioned, info available at time of sale

Fall Sale Dates
Oct. 2nd, Nov. 6th and Dec. 4th
 Sale every Monday at 3:00 pm

Go to www.davidclarkauction.com for more information

Interest in agriculture careers are on the rise
 by Beth Clawson, MSUE

The resurgence of interest in local foods, including where our foods come from and knowledge about the farmer that grew it, has created more interest in learning about local foods in schools. People do not always think about agriculture when they think about career opportunities and jobs. The agriculture industry is much larger than just farmers. It also includes building trades, natural resources trades, tourism, packaging engineering and manufacturers, food science specialists, inspectors, managers, marketers, engineers, chemists, biologists, mechanics, brokers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and so many more. Agriculture is one of the fastest-growing segments of Michigan's economy. According to a report from Michigan Agri-Business Association, the agriculture industry is diverse and high-tech. After many years of decline in the number of farmers, the increasing number of new farmers is encouraging. The resurgence of interest in local foods, including where our foods come from and knowledge about the farmer that grew it, has created more interest in learning about local foods in schools. Youth that are learning about local foods, agriculture and nutrition in schools make more informed personal choices about food and health, according to the Agriculture Council of America. This message is repeated by people supporting the local food movement. Additionally, youth who learn more about agriculture in schools are more interested in agriculture-related career choices later. According to the Michigan Land Use Institute: "Not only is locally produced food delicious, Michigan's diverse food system offers a tremendous opportunity to create new jobs and spur economic growth. By investing in a local food economy, communities benefit from better tasting and healthier food, precious landscapes are maintained, and our local economy grows." Taking the time to become knowledgeable about agriculture in Michigan makes you an informed citizen; informed citizens are better able to help shape the policies that support the local agriculture industry in Michigan. For more information about local foods, contact Beth Clawson, MSU Extension educator. To learn more about local foods, community food systems and food hubs contact Michigan State University Extension Community Food System educators who are working across Michigan to provide community food systems educational programming and assistance.

Why farm in Michigan's Upper Peninsula?

Low cost land and a laidback lifestyle may seem appealing, but the basics of successful farming in Michigan's Upper Peninsula are the same as everywhere else: careful planning, efficient use of resources, adaptability, commitment and good luck.

Posted on **August 28, 2014** by **Jim Isleib**, Michigan State University Extension

After 25 years of work as a Michigan State University Extension educator with farms of various types and sizes in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, several things have become clear.

- The environment here, including weather, soil types and the short growing season, makes successful farming a challenge.
- The distance to market often adds expense and complication to profitable agriculture production.
- The number of traditional farms is decreasing.
- The infrastructure serving Upper Peninsula farmers (businesses supplying seed, fertilizer, lime, equipment, etc.) is adequate, but often distant.
- Many farmers have few farming neighbors to work with and depend on.
- Some farms do not have an upcoming generation to take on the agricultural business.
- Relatively small fields and equipment make large-scale crop production difficult.

These and many other factors, most of them similar to agriculture throughout Michigan, make up Upper Peninsula farming. But there are some unique aspects, primarily weather, soils and access to markets, that give a special twist to farming here.

And the people... Those who love farming in the Upper Peninsula are not necessarily natives of the area, but only the tough ones stay. There is a certain kind of understanding among farmers who have to blow over 200 inches of snow out of the barnyard over the winter to let the milk truck in, or get the livestock fed. Again, this quiet pride among farmers is not restricted to the Upper Peninsula, but there are some unique features. Like the calculated risk that the plastic on your hoop houses will hold up to the snow load until you can get out with your snow blower to cut out the pile along the bottom. Or that enough snow will melt off the fields so you can get your small grains and hay seeding in by the second week of May, or negotiating with the milk hauler to keep your isolated farm on the route.

Every year, I am contacted by a few people wanting to come to the Upper Peninsula to farm. Some are beginners, maybe dreamers, and others are experienced people looking for different opportunities. Here are a few of the things I tell them.

Land price for purchase or rent is relatively cheap, with rent for cropping land around \$20-40 per acre in many areas.

What will grow here?

- For commodity-type farms: grass, mixed hay, pasture, alfalfa in some places, corn (mostly for silage), small grains including oats, barley and wheat, potatoes, and canola. Some of the areas with more moderate climate will support dry beans. Forages are the backbone of Upper Peninsula agriculture.
- For smaller scale, local food producers: cole crops or Brassicas, shorter season and cold hardy vegetables, sweet corn, and with season extending hoop houses, just about anything.

What can I produce that will make money? Maybe cover the land costs? Ah, that's really the tough question. This is where careful, realistic planning is a must. Do you have the finances, labor resources, willingness to assume risk, and dedication that it will take? The time-tested and proven sustainable farms, environmentally and economically, include:

- Dairy farms.
- Beef cow-calf farms (selling weaned feeder cattle).
- Beef farms (buying feeder calves and selling as larger feeder cattle).
- Potato farms.
- Specialty fruit and vegetable farms, for example U-pick strawberries and pumpkins. Location near a major town is critical for success.

Newer to the farming community, but showing promise, are the small, diversified farms supplying smaller volumes of fresh produce, poultry and meat products locally. These farms often utilize hoop house technology to extend the growing season. Very few are certified as organic, but many use organic production techniques. They are marketing through farmers markets, community supported agriculture shares with customers, on-farm stands, and, increasingly, into restaurants and institutions. An Upper Peninsula food hub is under development to stimulate growth in this sector.

Numerous small, part-time farms specialize in single commodities, such as horse hay or raising feed pigs for local sale, even cold-tolerant fruit orchards.

Here's a quick peek at a few selected field crop acreages in the Upper Peninsula, compared with the total for the state of Michigan.

Field crop acreages in the Upper Peninsula compared with Michigan total

Crop	Upper Peninsula acres	Michigan acres	Upper Peninsula as % of Michigan
Perennial hay	133, 938	940,000	14%
Barley	5,300	8,000	66%
Oats	6,500	50,000	13%
Potatoes	2,225	46,000	5%
Corn	13,180	2,600,000	0.5%
Wheat	2,160	630,000	0.3%
Dry beans	1,450	175,000	0.8%
Soybean	1,300	1,900,000	0.07%

If you're interested in farming in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, take a couple of weeks to tour around, visit the various pockets of agriculture in the region such as Delta and Menominee counties, Bruce Crossing/Ontonagon, Engadine/Germfask, Chippewa County, and other places. Visit with local farmers if possible, MSU Extension people, local agriculture supply companies, vets, USDA staff and others. Learn everything you can. Then think it over – carefully.

This article was published by **Michigan State University Extension**. For more information, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu>. To have a digest of information delivered straight to your email inbox, visit <http://bit.ly/MSUENews>. To contact an expert in your area, visit <http://expert.msue.msu.edu>, or call 888-678-3464.

October 2014 - FSA News

USDA NOTIFIES PRODUCERS OF ACREAGE HISTORY AND YIELDS

Written notifications from USDA are underway to farmers that provide updates on their current base acres, yields and 2009-2012 planting history.

Please cross check the letter from USDA with your farm records. If the information is correct, no further action is needed at this time, but if our letter is incomplete or incorrect, contact your local FSA office as soon as possible.

Verifying the accuracy of data on a farm's acreage history is a required early step for enrolling in the upcoming Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) program and the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program. Later this summer, farmers and ranchers will have an opportunity to update their crop yield information and reallocate base acres.

By mid-winter all producers on a farm will be required to make a one-time, unanimous and irrevocable election between price protection and county revenue protection or individual revenue protection for 2014-2018 crop years. Producers can expect to sign contracts for ARC or PLC for the 2014 and 2015 crop years in the spring of 2015.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (includes short grain rice and temperate japonica rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed, and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov or the local FSA office for information about FSA and the 2014 Farm Bill programs.

ATTENTION PRODUCERS!! - 2014 Production Due

Your 2014 production is needed. As you complete harvesting for the 2014 growing season, be sure to turn your production into your local FSA office.

TREE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP) SIGN-UP CONTINUES

As of Tuesday, April 15, 2014, orchardists and nursery tree growers who experienced losses from natural disasters that occurred on or after Oct. 1, 2011, can sign up for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). TAP was authorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 as a permanent disaster program. TAP provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.

Eligible tree types include trees, bushes or vines that produce an annual crop for commercial purposes. Nursery trees include ornamental, fruit, nut and Christmas trees that are produced for commercial sale. Trees used for pulp or timber are ineligible.

To qualify for TAP, orchardists must suffer a qualifying tree, bush or vine loss in excess of 15 percent mortality from an eligible natural disaster. The eligible trees, bushes or vines must have been owned when the natural disaster occurred; however, eligible growers are not required to own the land on which the eligible trees, bushes and vines were planted.

If the TAP application is approved, the eligible trees, bushes and vines must be replaced within 12 months from the date the application is approved. The cumulative total quantity of acres planted to trees, bushes or vines, for which a producer can receive TAP payments, cannot exceed 500 acres annually.

NONINSURED CROP DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NAP) INSURANCE DEADLINES

Has a natural disaster like drought, excessive rain, or high winds caused crop losses or prevented planting? Did this impact your bottom line? Crops not insurable under Risk Management Agency CAT Crop Insurance are covered under NAP and can be purchased for \$250 per crop and a maximum of \$750 per county!

To qualify for administrative service fee waiver, a limited resource producer must have a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of 4, or less than 50% of the county median household in both the previous 2 years. Limited resource producer status can be determined using a web site available through the Limited Resource Farmer and Rancher Online Self Determination Tool through the National Resource and Conservation Service at www.lrfstool.sc.egov.usda.gov/tols.asp. Please note that limited resource producers are required to recertify limited resource producer status annually.

THE NEXT DEADLINE for purchasing your 2015 policy is:

December 1, 2014 - Honey & Maple Sap

BEGINNING FARMER LOANS

FSA assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm.

Additional program information, loan applications, and other materials are available at your local USDA Service Center. You may also visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

GREAT INTEREST RATES: Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL)

Remember: these loans are now available for Hay/Forage Storage as well as traditional grain storage!

September Interest Rates:

- 2.125 percent for 7 years with a loan of \$100,000 or less
- 2.500 percent for 10 years with a loan of \$100,000 - \$250,000
- 2.625 percent for 12 years with a loan of \$250,000 - \$500,000

Contact your local FSA county office for October's interest rates.



The 2014 Farm Bill and the new farm programs:

What should I do ASAP?

The 2014 farm bill contains new farm programs that will require complex decisions by farmers. There are actions that should be taken now to prepare for the decisions that must be made during the coming months.

Posted on **September 15, 2014** by [David Schweikhardt](#), Michigan State University Extension and MSU AgBioResearch, Roger Betz, Dennis Stein and Adam Kantrovich, MSU Extension

The 2014 farm bill contains new farm programs that will require complex decisions by farmers and landlords in late 2014 and early 2015. While many of the specific rules for these decisions have not yet been released by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), producers and landlords should be aware that there are actions that should be taken now to prepare for the decisions that must be made during the coming months. This paper will examine these upcoming decisions and the actions that should be taken as soon as possible to prepare for these decisions.

The three major decisions for farmers and landlords in the 2014 Farm Bill

The 2014 farm bill includes three decisions that farmers and landlords will be required to make in 2014 and 2015:

1. **Updating Program Yields:** Owners will be permitted to update their program yields based on the farm's actual production yields from 2008-2012.
2. **Reallocating Base Acres:** Owners will be permitted to reallocate their base acres based on the farm's actual planted acreage from 2009-2012.
3. **ARC Programs versus PLC Program:** The Direct and Countercyclical Payments (DCP) that were used under the 2008 farm bill have been eliminated. Producers (landowners and tenants) will be permitted to choose between the new Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs that replaced the DCP program.

Though many details on these decisions are not yet available, some important steps in preparing for these decisions can now be taken and some important deadlines are now in place. In addition, the process of collecting information for these decisions should begin now. The final timeline for owner/producer decisions has not yet been announced, but a general timeline is available. Owners will have an opportunity to update program yields and reallocate base acres during the late summer and fall of 2014. Decisions on the ARC/PLC programs are likely to be required during late 2014 and early 2015.

2014 Farm Bill Decisions: What to do ASAP

In August 2014, the FSA started the process of implementing the 2014 farm bill by sending to owners and producers a letter with each farm's "Reported Commodity Crop History Summary" that provides each farm's recorded base acreage, program yields and 2009-2012 planting history. **This information will be a key factor in making decisions during 2014 and 2015.** Owners and producers should do the following as soon as possible to prepare for the upcoming year:

1. **Review** the FSA letter and Reported Commodity Crop History Summary and inform FSA within 60 days of the letter's date if the information is incorrect.
2. **Begin now** to collect information on the farm's actual planting history during 2009-2012 – how many acres of each crop were planted on the entire farm during each year from 2009-2012?) and the farm's actual yield history (what was the yield per acre for each crop planted on the entire farm during each year from 2008-2012?). Evidence from all sources (sales receipts, crop insurance records, etc.) should be collected retained (NOTE: FSA has not yet announced the rules regarding the information required for program decisions. Consequently, all information that could prove helpful in proving actual planted acreage or actual yields could be helpful).

3. **Communicate** with your tenants and/or your landlords. The upcoming decisions will affect the program benefits that a farm collects during 2014 to 2018. **All parties have a common interest in making the best possible decisions for the farm, so good communication and cooperation between landlords and tenants will be beneficial for all parties involved.**
4. **Stay informed** about the upcoming deadlines for decisions in late 2014 and early 2015. Read all emails and newsletters from your local FSA office and consult with your local FSA office and with your tenants or landlords about these decisions.
5. **Be patient but be alert.** The farm bill was passed by Congress and signed by the President at a relatively late date, and the FSA has a major challenge in implementing the new programs in the 2014 farm bill. Landlords will need to become informed about program options and key deadlines and cooperate with tenants. Tenants can often have numerous landlords that they will need to consult and enrollment dates could fall during peak work periods. The new programs are likely to require some complex decisions in late 2014 and early 2015. Landowners and tenants should stay informed about program deadlines and program options to cooperate in the best possible decisions for each farm.

A special ASAP note for winter wheat producers in Michigan

Producers of covered commodities (corn, wheat, and soybeans in Michigan) will be eligible for the new "Supplemental Coverage Option" (or SCO) beginning with the 2015 crop. The SCO is a form of crop insurance that provides an additional form of coverage for the deductible of the producer's underlying crop insurance policy. The SCO can be purchased as an endorsement to any of the Yield Protection, Revenue Protection, or Revenue Protection with the Harvest Price Exclusion policies. The Federal Government pays 65 percent of the premium cost for SCO.

Details on the [SCO program](#) are available at the [USDA Risk Management Agency website](#) as well as a [calculator for SCO coverage](#). A map of the availability of SCO for winter wheat is available on the [USDA website](#).

[Michigan State University Extension](#) advises winter wheat producers to consult their crop insurance agent to discuss options and deadlines under the Supplemental Coverage Option.

Additional information and useful tools can be found at the [Michigan State University Extension Farm Information Resource Management \(FIRM\) website](#).

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Tax plan now to avoid problems later

Farms that have seen good commodity prices and profits along with Dairy and Beef prices at all-time highs are vulnerable for some real tax issues in 2014.

By **Dennis Stein**, Farm Business Management Educator
Michigan State University Extension

It may seem early in the year for tax planning, but for dairy and beef operators, this preparation should have started a couple months ago. For many years, farms have faced the challenge of managing their farm income to avoid income spikes or failures. Both of those scenarios can have negative impacts on the farm's financial position and annual tax liability. For dairy farms, 2014 is on track to be one of the highest average milk price years on record. Coupled with Michigan dairy farms producing more milk per cow and incomes could be very high. Michigan State University Extension recommends estimating your farm's tax situation now. You can find a simple [one page worksheet](#) is available to estimate farm tax situation. The worksheet was designed for 2013 but will be a close estimate of where you should be for 2014 at this point in time.

It is always a good idea to pay down debt when the opportunity presents itself, and many farms have focused on paying down loans during this profitable time. This practice may be an issue in calculation of this year's tax liability. Debt payments are made with after-tax dollars as the principal payments are a cash flow expense but not a tax deductible expense. Paying down loans will help to empty the checking account, but the debt payment creates a tax bill that you will not see until tax planning time or tax reporting next February.

Many farms have been using the option to pre-purchase or pre-pay some farm input needs during the last few months of the year for use in the production of next year's commodities. This is a great tool as it often allows you to take advantage of early order discounts and most important to lock in the cost of those inputs. If you have been using this practice in the past, you may find your farm in the position to again repeat this practice again this year. These early purchases do require the farm to manage their cash flow to make this possible. Cash flow may be an issue if the farm is attempting to prepare for inputs while also delaying or deferring income during the last few months of the year.

A tax management tool that has been widely used in past years was the use of Section 179 Direct Expense depreciation option as well as the bonus depreciation. In previous years, those options allowed up to \$500,000 be used for Section 179 before phasing out at \$2 million. That option is no longer available to that same limit. Unless congress and the President take action, the \$500,000 option presently stands at \$25,000 for the 2014 tax year with an adjustment for inflation.

Many farms have also used bonus depreciation that was available in past years. Presently, there is no bonus depreciation available to be used for the 2014 tax year. In the past these tools were extensively used to help level a farm's income from one year to the next along with pre-pays and other tax tools. For those farms that may find themselves again with higher than expected incomes, some of these tools have been significantly reduced or are no longer available. This is especially true when one considers Section 179 and bonus depreciation have been used so extensively that a farm may find that they have minimum carry-over depreciation. This will require farms to begin to prepare for tax planning earlier researching for other management strategies that may be necessary.

The key point to remember is that expense and income management together is an important farm financial management strategy and that 2014 is a year where planning will need to start early.

You may want to contact your tax advisor soon. For Michigan farmers, you can also contact a [farm management educator](#) with [Michigan State University Extension](#). Additional resources and information on this and other farm management topics are available at the [Michigan State University Extension FIRM webpage](#).

What happens to corn silage quality due to an early frost?

Frost events will make management decisions more important for silage producers.

By **Phil Kaatz**, Forage Educator Michigan State University Extension

During the 2014 growing season, the weather has been consistently cooler and wetter in the central and northern portions of Michigan, and frost has occurred in several locations during the latter days of summer. In most years, corn silage harvest starts in late August and early September for most producers. The reduction of growing degree day units and early frost will mean immature corn silage will be harvested in many locations leading to differences in silage quality compared to years with normal growth and development.

When evaluating corn silage quality, most producers consider protein and energy or starch content as the most important characteristics to determine the value of the crop. Immature harvested corn silage will have lower dry matter (DM) yield, starch and energy concentrations, and higher sugar, crude protein and neutral detergent fiber (NDF) concentrations as compared to mature corn silage. Dry matter yield and digestibility of immature corn silage are highest at the time of the first frost and additional losses occur as frosted corn remains in the field. This has led to reduced milk yields after repeated frost events. In addition, the corn silage might have higher effluent losses and extensive fermentation that could reduce dry matter intakes.

Changes in nutrient composition of corn silage with advancing maturity

	DM	CP	NE	NDF	ADF	Lignin
Maturity*	%	%	Mcal/lb	%	%	%
Immature	23.5	9.7	0.62	54.1	34.1	3.5
Normal	35.1	8.8	0.66	45.0	28.1	2.6
Mature	44.2	8.5	0.61	44.5	27.5	3.1

Source: "Nutrient Requirements of Dairy Cattle, 2011"

Maturity was categorized by dry matter content (% DM): Immature, less than 25% DM; Normal, 32-38% DM; Mature, greater than 40% DM. To manage a frosted immature crop, several factors should be considered at harvest:

- Harvest at the correct DM content. Leaves will quickly turn brown and although the plant appears dry, whole plant DM will not decrease as quickly on a total plant basis. The majority of plant moisture will be found in the stalk and ear. Use whole plant DM to determine when to begin chopping and target moisture content between 32-38 percent DM.
- Harvest as quickly as possible. Increased drying of the plants usually occurs and delays may lead to silage that does not pack properly. Additionally, this will lower the risk of any molds that could grow on the ear while still in the field.
- Monitor silage particle size and kernel breakage. Cornell University recommends that there should be greater than 90 percent of kernels broken or damaged.
- Check each field prior to harvesting as different growing conditions from field to field and hybrid to hybrid will cause whole plant DM to change.
- Use of bacterial silage inoculant should be considered to improve fermentation efficiency and DM recovery. Frost will kill some of the normal bacteria found on the plant.

The best suggestion for producers when harvesting frosted corn silage is to use the basic principles that go hand in hand with good management practices. For more information contact [Michigan State University Extension's Phil Kaatz](#) at kaatz@msu.edu or 810-667-0341.

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Meetings & Events Calendar

October

October 4 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. EST, U.P. Smart Gardening Program, Ramada Inn, 412 W. Washington St., Marquette, MI Contact: MSU Extension Iron County Office: 906-875-0606

October 31 Happy Halloween

November

November 2 Daylight Savings time ends.
November 4 Together at the Table – LSSU Cisler Center, Sault Ste. Marie
November 5-6 MSU Fall Conference — Kellogg Center
November 5 Together at the Table – NMU University Center, Marquette
November 6 Together at the Table – MTU Memorial Union, Houghton
November 6 Clare County Livestock Sale, 1:00 pm Clare, Michigan
November 27 Happy Thanksgiving

December

December 4 Clare County Livestock Sale, 1:00 pm Clare, Michigan

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Published monthly by
Ontonagon County
MSU Extension
725 Greenland Road
Ontonagon, MI 49953